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Ohio State Engineer

Title: The Engineer's Bookshelf

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Issue Date: 1945-06

Publisher: Ohio State University, College of Engineering

Citation: Ohio State Engineer, vol. 28, no. 7 (June, 1945), 14, 30.

URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/36182>

The Engineer's Bookshelf . . .

By WILSON R. DUMBLE

Carrier War

If you recall correctly, you will remember that after our heavy losses suffered in the first months of the war in the Pacific, the situation seemed very dark. It is no longer any secret that we were for months hard-pressed to keep even one aircraft carrier in operation against Japan. The enemy expanded and held extensive conquests in the Pacific; they constituted a real threat to our national existence.

All the while a new carrier fleet was being built, it was necessary to keep faith in eventual victory and in the instrument of naval air power. Now, two years later, our confidence has been justified. As of the end of August, 1944, the Navy possessed roughly one hundred aircraft carriers either in or nearing action, and over forty-seven thousand Navy and Marine fliers; at the end of the first half of 1944 it had over thirty-four thousand aircraft. For the past several years we have been delivering these men, planes, and ships in increasing numbers to the able hands of Admiral Nimitz.

This encouraging story of the rebuilding of our fleet, and in particular, the exploits of Task Force Fifty-Eight, and of one carrier, the *Yorktown*, are described in an excellent little book called *Carrier War* by Lieutenant Oliver Jensen, of the USNR.

A carrier is an amazing ship. The *Yorktown*, as Lieutenant Jensen describes her, included all the necessities of a city and many of the luxuries, with the obvious exception, of course, of female inhabitants. She had her own, stores, bakery, butcher shop, library, her own soda fountain, and the very latest movies. Completely self-reliant, she solved the problem of supply by carrying with her both fuel and provisions, replacement planes and pilots, and every means of maintenance.

A carrier serves her fliers as a grand combination of mother, wife, nurse, and maid-of-all-work. Air Group Five, during the many months it was aboard the *Yorktown*, was the excuse and reason for the carrier's existence. One of the biggest air groups, at sea, it mustered less than three hundred men, a little more than a tenth of the *Yorktown's* total complement of over twenty-five hundred men.

Carrier War follows the *Yorktown* and her sister ship through the victories at Marcus, the Gilberts, Truk, Palau, up through the two great battles of the Philippine Sea, off Saipan and Leyte. Much of the material here is revealed for the first

time; and for reasons of military censorship it could not be told before. The same is true of the some two hundred photographs which illustrate the book. Many of these, too, are reproduced for the first time. Incidentally, that very fine documentary film, "Fighting Lady," although it never mentions the name of the *Yorktown*, is said to be based largely on her exploits.

Lieutenant Oliver Jensen, author of *Carrier War*, is a six foot, four-inch New Englander of English and Norwegian ancestry. After graduating from Yale in 1936, he tucked his Phi Beta Kappa key into a drawer and got his first job in New York writing radio thrillers. Following an interlude in advertising, he became an editor of the late humor magazine, *Judge*; then he commenced writing articles for *Life* magazine. He joined the *Life* staff permanently in 1940, taking leave for the war to become a Navy Ensign in June 1942. His first assignment was as a watch officer on a destroyer, running convoys in North Atlantic and Icelandic waters and fighting U-boats through the bad winter of 1942-43. Later as an unofficial naval correspondent, he spent several months with a Navy squadron in England before returning and flying to the Pacific. He wrote *Carrier War* after personally watching Task Force Fifty-Eight in action there. Although he had had a number of published articles, *Carrier War* is his first book, and it is a good one, too. It should interest Navy families.

Death Was Our Escort

Every conceivable weapon of modern warfare is being utilized by our men, not the least of them the Navy's PT boats. You can learn more about them in a book entitled "*Death Was Our Escort*," which is the story of Lieutenant Edward T. Hamilton, written by Lieutenant Commander Ernest G. Vetter.

Lieutenant Hamilton wanted to be a flyer. While waiting to be called, he joined the Navy and was commissioned as an Ensign Ordnance-Volunteer Specialist. "Of all the services I can think of in the Navy," the author writes, "none is more likely to give its men the gruelling, merciless, ruthless, daily grapple with danger, the perpetual dance on the edge of the volcano, that you get in the PT boats." The PT boat is small, "eighty feet long, twenty-one feet wide amidships and ten feet from keel to topside. In spite of

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its size, however, it carries five fifty-caliber machine guns, a twenty millimeter cannon, two thirty-caliber machine guns, several Browning automatic rifles and Thompson sub-machine guns." The author informs us that speed is the PT boat's only protection. Vulnerable, everywhere unarmored, with hulls made of Honduras mahogany plywood, and fragile as empty eggshells, the PT boat relies solely on its speed for its life.

Here is not only the story of Lieutenant Hamilton, but also the story of thousands of boys trying to avoid death while dealing it out to enemy warships in the Pacific. Although these small, fast boats can dish out plenty of lead, they cannot survive even one direct hit. In the Battle of the Bismark Sea, with five out of the seven PT boats destroyed, and the bases bombed, the two remaining boats couldn't even be overhauled. After engaging in an attack on a convoy of twenty-two enemy ships, one PT was lost. The only PT left was the one Hamilton was on. A coral reef, however, and not a Jap shell, finally destroyed this gallant lone survivor. After it went down, two officers and nine enlisted men swam to the enemy shore. Of the nine men, only three got back—hungry, sick and exhausted—after playing hide and seek with the Japs for fourteen days in jungles and swamps.

If you want an exciting story of the PT boat and its contribution to this war, be sure to read "*Death Was Our Escort.*"
